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155.

HISTORIC EVENTS AND PLACES IN ALBERTA.

THE BLOCKHOUSE ON THE LUCAS FARM.

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HISTORIC EVENTS AND PLACES IN ALBERTA.

THE BLOCKHOUSE ON THE LUCAS FARM.

Historic Blockhouse on Lucas Farm,

near Wetaskiwin,

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1. On an early spring day in the year 1885, Frank Lucas, then living on the abandoned government farm at Peace Hills, some forty miles south of Fort Edmonton, saw Captain Ethier and Lieutenant Villeneuve march in to the old farm building at the head of twenty men of the 65th Mount Royal Rifles and proceed to fortify the place. There was considerable significance in the event, as the second Riel rebellion was then at its height and the white settlers of the country were without any assurance that the dawn of every new day would not find them surrounded by Indian war parties. In the face of the menace, Mr. Lucas had sent his wife and family into Fort Edmonton.

Taking the building already on the site as their centre, the men of the 65th threw up an earthworks and a palisade around the entire enclosure. Among the fortifications added later, was a stout, loop-holed bastion which commanded the Bigstone creek valley. From the flagstaff on this little blockhouse the flag of the French-Canadian regiment was unfurled.

2. Replica of Famous Flag.

On a day, brilliant with sunshine, on August 22, 1923, Frank Lucas, still living on the old Peace Hills farm, saw

another cavalcade swing in from the Edmonton-Calgary trail. The palisade and the main buildings of Fort Ethier were gone, and the moat had been long filled in, but still commanding the beautiful Bigstone valley stood the sturdy little block-house. The newcomers talked with the old pioneer, there was a little informal gathering and the visitors presented the owner of the farm with a replica of the original flag flown on the bastion by the 65th regiment. As Mr. Lucas raised the rather crude bit of bunting to the staff and the cheers of those assembled echoed in the Bigstone valley, it seemed as though the gap of thirty-eight years had been bridged in an instant.

3. Built During Rebellion.

Hundreds of Edmonton citizens motoring south on the Calgary trail have passed the blackhouse, five miles this side of Wetaskiwin, and not even noticed it, little realizing that it was historic ground. Those who did notice it and took the trouble to enquire as to the origin of the little fort discovered that it was built during the rebellion of '85 by men of the 65th regiment who came with General Strange on his march to Edmonton from Calgary. It was one of a number of outposts erected to protect the line of communication between the two main posts. It not only did that, however. "The rebellion was over as far as this part of the country was concerned when the fort was built," says Mr. Lucas.

Preserve Old Blockhouse.

Having in mind the fate that has overtaken most of the old posts in the west the Historical Society of Alberta decided that no time should be lost in marking and preserving the old block-house. An attempt was made to identify it and the conclusion finally arrived at was that it was Fort Ostell, erected by a captain of the 65th of that name. With the intention of de-dicating such a fort a large party of Historical Society members left Edmonton on Wednesday for the spot where a good crowd of Wetaskiwin citizens had already gathered.

On their arrival on the banks of the Bigstone they were met by Mr. Lucas, who explained to them the positions of the original fortifications. He could not recollect the name of Captain Ostell, however. The men in command at the post, if he remembered correctly, were Captain Ethier and Lieutenant Villeneuve. Plans of the different forts and records of the men in charge were produced by Major Thibadeau, an old member of the 65th, and sure enough it was discovered that the blockhouse was a part of Captain Ethier's fortifications.

4. Identity Established.

It was rather hard on the men who had prepared speeches for Fort Ostell, but there was general satisfaction that the identity of the post had finally been established. The gathering was then called to order by Dr. Rutherford, president of the Historical Society, who, after giving a few highlights of the

'85th rebellion, called upon Mayor Montgomery, of Wetaskiwin.

5. Mr. Montgomery recalled how the recently deceased Chief Ermineskin had remained loyal when Bobtail and his men joined the rebellion, and paid a deep tribute to the old Indian chieftain, who, up until his death, was a wellknown figure in this part of the province. R. Craig, reeve of the municipal district also spoke, extending the welcome of the district to the visitors.

6. Rev. W. Everard Edmonds, secretary of the Historical Society, explained briefly the objects of the organization in keeping green the memories of the men who had won the country for Britain and in marking historic spots.

7. Presentation of Flag.

Colonel F. C. Jamieson then made the presentation of the flag to Mr. Lucas. It was a replica of the original, which was still prized highly by the regiment, explained the Colonel, and in making the presentation the 65th had felt the greatest pleasure in knowing that their flag again would fly from the old bastion.

Mr. Lucas, in replying, told of how his brother, W. B. Lucas, had come to the farm in 1879 for the Indian department to teach them how to farm. It was at this place that the Indians cut their first furrows with the plough. The farm, however, was abandoned in 1883 and shortly afterwards the present owner took up his residence there.

8. Major Thibaudear, official representative of the 65th Regiment, gave an account of the activities of the Montreal men during the 120 days campaign and told of how Fort Ethier was built. It had never seen any action, he explained, except for a few stray shots that were fired at it, but it had served its purpose well.

Senator Cote spoke.

Senator J. L. Cote expressed considerable pleasure that his first public appearance since becoming a member of the Canadian Senate was at such an historic occasion. He expressed regret that the French-Canadian regiment to which he belonged in Quebec at the time of the rebellion had not shared the good fortune of the 65th to be called into service.

9. Old friends of Mr. Lucas in the persons of John A. McDougall Kenneth McLeod and A. Micuelon recalled the old days when General Strange's column marched up to Edmonton and then proceeded down the Saskatchewan in pursuit of the cold-blooded Big Bear and his braves.

John Blue, secretary of the Edmonton Board of Trade, brought the occasion to a snappy conclusion with one of his terse, straight-to-the-point speeches. The gathering broke up after the singing of the National Anthem, and all present were the guests of Mr. Lucas to tea.

Among the Edmontonians present were Hon. A. C. Rutherford, John Blue, John A. McDougall. W. Everard Edmonds, Prof. M. H. Long

E. N. Hignbotham, D. S. Mackenzie, Senator Cote, Kenneth McLeod, Major Thibaudean, Prof. A. L. Butt, A. B. Watt, W. J. Carter, Colonel F. C. Jamieson, Mr. and Mrs. Ed. McDougall, and Prof. Innis of Saskatoon.

--THE END--